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ABSTRACT

Presents the results of a questionnaire sent to teachers using the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.), and their principals. Generally favorable effects were reported by both groups, with the great majority of teachers indicating they would choose to continue using i.t.a. (DLG)

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REACTIONS OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS TO THE INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET

May, 1971

Research Report 71-24

Department of Planning and Evaluation
Board of School Trustees
1595 West 10th Avenue
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Questionnaire re Initial Teaching Alphabet
Summary of Responses of Principals and Teachers, May, 1971.

Near the end of May, 1971, questionnaires were sent to 13 of the 49 Vancouver schools with i.t.a. classes. The schools were selected to be representative of the city. Teachers of i.t.a. classes and principals at these schools responded to the questionnaire; the principals answered only those questions that were appropriate. Responses were tallied for 12 principals and 40 teachers (in some cases, more than one person's comments were on one questionnaire).

Responses for teachers and principals were combined for this summary since there were no outstanding differences between the groups.

Most of the i.t.a. classes at these schools were Grade 1 classes but there were some Grade 2 and Junior Special classes. The teachers were asked to indicate how many of their pupils had made the transition to t.o. Approximately 68% of the pupils in Grade 1 and Junior Special classes had made the transition by the end of May. Unfortunately, the criteria of transition varied among teachers.

The responses to the questionnaires are summarized below except for those to the first four items, (the number of pupils in the class, the number of pupils who had completed the transition to traditional orthography, the number on each book, and the number of library books read).

5. Please note any effects that the use of i.t.a. appears to have on achievement in reading.

- read earlier and progress rapidly (9)
- fluency and expression (oral reading) (8)
- can sound out new words, will try almost any word (7)
- read more, ready to attack any book (6)
- self-confidence, more relaxed, satisfaction (6)
- more interested in reading (5)
- more independent (5)
- two principals remarked that achievement was high in the early grades but was near average in Grade 4
- no one mentioned any negative effects

6. Please note any effects that the use of i.t.a. appears to have in other subject areas.

Oral expression

- same, no change (9)
- good, improved (7)
- other positive remarks: increased vocabulary, careful pronunciation, more natural, more expressive
- no negative comments

Written expression

- all comments positive
- improved, better (18)
- write more, write freely (5)
- write earlier and express themselves better (4)

Free reading

- read more (16)
- enjoy it, greater interest (7)

Speech

- excellent for helping pupils with speech problems (10)
- improves enunciation, pronunciation, fluency, etc. (6)
- generally good (5)
- draws attention to any speech defects (3)

Printing

- poorer, not as neat (11)
- several mentioned that printing was faster but less tidy
- same, no change (8)
- good, improved (3)

Other areas

- some spelling problems (3)
- useful in other subjects, helps with individualized work

7. In your opinion, has i.t.a. been any more successful with one group of pupils than another; viz., bright, slow, or average?

- no, equally successful at all levels (18)
- slow (11)
- bright (11)
- average (4)
- average to bright (4)

"... its success with slow children is perhaps its most encouraging aspect".

"Most systems work better with bright pupils."

8. Please note any difficulties your pupils appear to be having in making the transition to t.o.

- none (20)

"There are no difficulties if the transition is made when the pupils are ready for it."

- spelling (7)
- slow children have some problems (3)

9. What disadvantages do you see in using i.t.a. ?

- none (11)
- pupils transfering in and out (8)
- some spelling problems (7)
- can't read regular books, don't have i.t.a. materials at home (5)
- cost (2)

10. and 11. Please note any emotional reactions of your pupils to the use of i.t.a. Please list any effects of i.t.a. that you have noted on personality traits.

(The responses for the two questions were combined since there was considerable overlap.)

- none (14)
- negative comments (frustrated, wanted to make transition too early) (6)

all other comments were positive:
- confidence (15)
- enjoy reading, excited about it (12)
- happy (7)
- outgoing, relaxed, less shy

12. In general, what is your reaction to the use of i.t.a. in your class? (Teachers)

- enjoy teaching it (15)
- good method for teaching reading (9)
- children enjoy it (2)

Would you choose to continue to teach with i.t.a. ?

- yes (35)
- no (1)

13. In general, what has been the reaction of parents?

- favourable, good, enthusiastic (36)
- mixed reactions, worries about transition, spelling (7)
- skeptical, confused (3)
- some parents blame any problems a child is having on i.t.a.

14. Did you find that the use of i.t.a. required a change in your methods of teaching reading? Explain. (Teachers)

- no (14)
- more work on sound, blending, etc., less on sight words (11)

Comments

Several teachers and principals mentioned that i.t.a. should be regarded as a two-year program. The handling of i.t.a. children in Grade 2 is very important.

Problem of educating teachers: "I have at times been frustrated by the assumption of fellow teachers that a child who hasn't transferred in Grade 1 has somehow failed."

The same questionnaire had been given to teachers and principals in April, 1967. The responses were very similar to those of this year. In the summary of the 1967 results, a difference was noted between the teachers and principals: the teachers were very enthusiastic and admitted few disadvantages, whereas the principals listed some shortcomings as well as advantages of i.t.a. In 1971, this difference was not apparent; advantages and problems were listed by both groups. At both times, there was a considerable divergence of opinion as to whether i.t.a. was more successful with one group of pupils than another. No major difficulties in making the transition to t.o. were noted. In general, the teachers and principals appear to be quite positive about i.t.a. for teaching beginning reading.